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RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA IMMEDIATE 0641

S E C R E T NASSAU 000177

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM BF CU

SUBJECT: OPULENT HAVANA DIGS: BAHAMAS LOOKS INTO MISSING
CASH AND VISA SCAM AT GCOB MISSION IN CUBA

REF: A. (C) 08 NASSAU 870
¶B. (S) 07 NASSAU 523

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Timothy Zuniga-Brown for reasons 1.4(b)
) and (d).

¶1. (U) Media highlighted lack of transparency and accountability in expenditures for the Bahamian Embassy in Cuba in coverage March 2 of an official auditor,s report from 2006-2007. The auditor general was unable to account for nearly a million dollars destined for the new Havana mission. The audit also detailed irregularities in visa processing, including verification of identity, sponsorship, and financial accounting.

¶2. (S) Former Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell rejected the reports as inaccurate. He ascribed the accounting problems to lack of documentation. He denied malfeasance and said that no money was missing. Mitchell blamed bad procedures for the visa processing problems, and said they were uncovered and corrected on his watch. Yet an MFA consular official privately accused the ex-Foreign Minister of involvement in a Chinese visa scam in April 2007 (ref B).

¶3. (U) An editorial March 4 titled &Lavish expensive embassy in Cuba& reiterates the auditor,s report,s findings and quoted a journalist,s impressions of the Havana mission and official residence,s opulence. The editorial concluded that the Prime Minister &had to change his mind about closing the Bahamas, embassy in Cuba& because the GCOB had already spent too much taxpayer money on it (ref A).

COMMENT

¶4. (S) Despite the ex-Foreign Minister,s denials, the auditor,s findings may be confirmation of precisely the sort of corrupt practices at the highest levels of government that contributed to the PLP,s election defeat in May 2007.
ZUNIGA-BROWN